



Category “symbol” in  
context of historical  
process understanding



## CATEGORY “SYMBOL” IN CONTEXT OF HISTORICAL PROCESS UNDERSTANDING

## LA CATEGORÍA “SIMBOLO” EN LA COMPRENSIÓN DEL CONTEXTO HISTÓRICO

## ABSTRACT

In the course of their development, people created a special type of culture, representing a specific world of things, values, symbols, which embodied the image containing an idea. One of the key issues in various scientific fields is the definition of the very concept of “symbol”. Nowadays, there is such a scientific discipline as symbol study. The authors of the article suggest to consider the origin and the evolution of the concept “symbol” in the context of historical process understanding. A symbol is one of the key concepts of the humanities and social sciences: the culturology of philosophy, sociology, history, psychology, linguistics, political science, ethnography, aesthetics, etc. During the study they established that symbols played an important role in the whole variety of human culture manifestations - in ideology and religion, politics and law, literature and music, painting and architecture, literature, etiquette, advertising and commerce. In its turn, culture can be represented in the form of a system of different symbols embodying the ideas, the ideals and the meanings by which people live in and which determine the development and the functioning of the culture itself.

KEYWORDS: symbol, symbolism, material and spiritual culture, mythology, idea, sign, image.

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## RESUMEN

En el curso de su desarrollo, las personas crearon un tipo especial de cultura, representando un mundo específico de cosas, valores, símbolos, que encarnaba la imagen que contenía una idea. Uno de los temas clave en varios campos científicos es la definición del concepto mismo de “símbolo”. Hoy en día, existe una disciplina científica como el estudio de símbolos. Los autores del artículo sugieren considerar el origen y la evolución del concepto “símbolo” en el contexto de la comprensión del proceso histórico. Un símbolo es uno de los conceptos clave de las humanidades y las ciencias sociales: la culturología de la filosofía, la sociología, la historia, la psicología, la lingüística, la ciencia política, la etnografía, la estética, etc. Durante el estudio establecieron que los símbolos desempeñaban un papel importante en la toda una variedad de manifestaciones de la cultura humana: en ideología y religión, política y derecho, literatura y música, pintura y arquitectura, literatura, etiqueta, publicidad y comercio. A su vez, la cultura puede ser representada en la forma de un sistema de diferentes símbolos que incorporan las ideas, los ideales y los significados por los cuales las personas viven y que determinan el desarrollo y el funcionamiento de la cultura misma.

PALABRAS CLAVE: símbolo, simbolismo, material y cultura espiritual, mitología, idea, signo, imagen.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Many researchers note that history is life, the activity of mankind for two million years. The need for historical self-awareness did not appear immediately among people. But Homo sapiens, as a man of reasoning, thinking, has been trying to comprehend the world through mythology for a long time. Myth in Greek means nothing other than "word" [Tokarev S.A. 1990, p. 15]. And this creativity is not really solved in its entire depth to this day.

There is hardly any other such phenomenon in the field of the spiritual culture of mankind as mythology, about which so different, directly opposite judgments were expressed. First, nowadays, some people connect it and almost identify with religion, others sharply oppose it. Some mix it with folk legends, legends, fairy tales, others separate it from them. Some consider mythology a reactionary load and a ballast in the spiritual heritage of people, others, on the contrary, consider it as a deeply progressive factor of culture [Tokarev S.A. 1962].

Secondly, one can come across information that mythology is a product of folk fantasy, containing naively personifying explanations of the real world facts in itself. Myths are born from the natural curiosity of the human mind and mythology, as a part of the world spiritual culture, was born in the process of knowledge and explanation by a man of nature, society and himself and is one of the ancient forms of the world perception [Scheglov G.V., Archer V. 2007, p. 4].

It is well known that ancient Greek literature developed on the basis of mythology. In the post-Homer period of Greece logography appears - an explanation of myths - along with philosophy and science. Literature creates a biography of a person, mythology creates a collective memory [Antique literature. 1973, p. 216]. Almost all our knowledge of the

symbols goes back, first, to folk legends, that is, mythology, and secondly, to cult customs [Bauer W., Dumotz I., Golowin S. 1986, p. 3].

## 2.METHODS OF RESEARCH.

The performed study is based on the principles of objectivity, historicism and scientific character, which allow us to identify evolutionary, regular appearance and the development of mythological consciousness. The logical, comparative-historical and problem-chronological methods were used for a consistent proof of the hypothesis put forward, which allowed to reconstruct various views on the functions and the significance of symbolism in Russian and foreign history completely and reliably.

## 3.MAIN PART.

Traditionally, it is considered that each person has his own mythology and has his own mythological thinking - a special kind of attitude [Makovsky M.M. 1996, p. 15]. In our opinion, this made a tremendous influence on such a common trait of any people as the elevation of certain individuals to the level of a symbol [Biedermann H. 1989., p. 6]. To confirm this, it is worth quoting the words of the famous Chinese philosopher Confucius, who said that the world is not ruled by word and law, but by signs and symbols [Foley J. 1993, p. 2].

The concept of a symbol is extremely multifaceted, multivalued and polysemantic. It is worth noting that the very word symbol comes from the Greek word "symbolon", meaning "contract", "sign", "difference" [Symbol. Plastic arts. Brief terminological dictionary. 1994., p. 118].

The word "symbol" has not lost its "weight", but has become a term that has taken a firm place in our life [Kopaliński W. 1999, p. 3].

A.F. Losev found about sixty concepts and definitions of the word "symbol" [Losev A.F. 1976]. This term is often used even in the most ordinary, everyday sense, when one wants to say that something points to something else, that is, they use the term "symbol" in the sense of a "sign" [Soboleva N.A., Artamanov V.A. 1993, p. 5].

V.V. Pohlebkina referred the oldest signs that existed in different nations and serve as the designation of luminaries, planets, stars and elements, as well as a person himself, his life, death and sex to the classical symbols [Pohlebkina V.V. 2006, p. 363]. According to available sources, symbol served as a conditional material identification mark in ancient Greece for the members of a certain social group, a secret community, etc. [Symbol. Encyclopedia of mystical terms. 2000, p. 446] In a traditional society, symbol was one of the ways for a friendly union conclusion: friends or like-minded people broke a certain object, usually a coin or a plaque, and each left a half. An original owner could give such a half to his trusted person or a relative, who also could rely on the help and the hospitality of his newfound symbolic partner [Ulyanov A.V. 2010, p. 13]. There is an opinion that the drafts of decisions drawn up at community meetings were also called symbols. United at a temple of some deity, his admirers recognized each other by special signs [Kasperavichyus M.M. 1990, p. 3].

K.G. Jung noted the following: "I do not mean that a symbol is an allegory or a simple sign; rather I understand by it some image that should, as far as possible, characterize only a vaguely supposed nature of a spirit. A symbol does not contain and does not explain, but points through itself to an incomprehensible, only vaguely assumed meaning that can not be satisfactorily expressed in any words of our modern language" [Jung K.G. 2017, p. 218].

In the opinion of the above-named researcher, if there are countless things outside human understanding, then we constantly use symbolic terminology to present concepts that we can not fully define or fully understand. This is one of the reasons why all religions use symbolic language or images. But such a conscious use of symbols is only one aspect of the psychological fact of great significance: a man also produces symbols spontaneously and unconsciously in the form of words [Jung K.G. 1996, pp. 116-117], because a word is not the same as a thing indicated by it, but simply a symbol [Plakhotnyuk V.N. 2009, p. 1018].

The works of researchers have the information on the multifaceted concept of a symbol with numerous meanings: "A symbol can be

compared with a crystal that transmits light in many different ways, depending on which side this light passes through. We can also say that a symbol is a living being, a particle of our own essence, which is in a constant motion and transformation. When we penetrate into it, at the moment when we realize that it is the impetus for revision and reflection, we simultaneously observe and study our own path while studying it, the direction is opened before us, following which our soul will fly away to new distances" [Sekirich E. Language of symbols - the language of eternity. URL: [http://www.manwb.ru/articles/simbolon/simbol\\_lengua/Simbols\\_lingva\\_ES/](http://www.manwb.ru/articles/simbolon/simbol_lengua/Simbols_lingva_ES/)].

Encyclopaedic and educational reference literature also contains the definition of a symbol as a conventional sign, which is based on the simplest outlines that receive a geometric or other conditional form and reflect this or that concept in this abstract form associated with a particular knowledge.

Symbolics is also the key to spiritual world understanding. In addition, the need to study symbolism lies in the fact that symbolism is a special language, the means of conveying information. Therefore, the participants of the communicative act must know from this what a particular symbol means [Kenner T.A. 2006, p.4].

A symbol, if you give it a definition, is something contained in our minds and personifies something else. The connection between an object and a symbol can be associative, based on similarity or purely conditional nature. Of course, there are images that are symbols in their pure form, that is, they have no other meaning, except symbolic one. This category includes some of the most abstract religious symbols. But in most cases, a symbolic meaning is simply one of the layers of knowledge, from which a general idea of a subject or a phenomenon is formed.

In the oldest cultural monuments, we can see the images that can often look like an ornamental decor, but in its essence, they are the symbols that convey certain knowledge and the ideas of people about the world. In these graphemes, people recorded vital information, and their function consisted in the passing of relevant knowledge to generations [Surina M.O. 2005, p. 3].

Having emerged from nature, people have created their own culture - a specific world of things, values, symbols that embody an image containing an idea. Symbols seem to unite two halves of a split world - a visible and an invisible one. They reveal the meaning of complex concepts and phenomena. And people always worried about the existence of a fatal combination of circumstances and the opportunity to bypass it, the ability to plan and program their own destiny [Symbols and their influence on people. 2004, p. 3].

S.S. Averentsev, noted that "A symbol is the same as a sign in science (logic, mathematics, etc.); it is a universal aesthetic category in art, revealing through the comparison of a sign and an allegory with the related categories of an artistic image" [Averentsev S.S. 1989., pp. 581-582].

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A symbol is the highest form of knowledge, and therefore it is extremely abstract, extremely concentrated and conditional. That's why the simplest forms (a point, a line) and geometric figures (a circle, a square, a triangle) are the "graphic form" of symbols most often. Graphically applied symbols denoting special concepts in various fields of knowledge are extremely conventional: they are, first of all, mathematical symbols (the signs of addition, subtraction, multiplication, division, etc.), the signs of mathematical logic, astronomical and astrological symbols, topographical signs, musical notation and others. The abstractness of a symbol is a necessary condition for its existence in "a symbolic quality": one can gain access to inmost knowledge only through the abstraction from reality. Symbols express the ideas of a higher abstraction, which can not be briefly described or formulated in words. For example, the symbol of Christianity is the cross, and the symbol of Islam is the crescent, both of these signs contain both religious doctrines in an extremely concentrated form [Symbol. The encyclope-

dia of symbols, signs and emblems. 2006, pp. 12-14].

In the understanding of many researchers and cultural figures, a symbol is a sign, a sign, a password, a signal, an omen. But, as V.K. Romanovsky noted, not every sign or a mark has a symbolic meaning. The concept of a symbol is much broader than it may seem at first glance [Romanovsky V.K. 2002, pp. 4-5]. A symbol conveys the meaning of a thing or an event, it is its semantic reflection and generalizes it, but by its original content it does not have a direct connection with a designated object.

Without going into the numerous disputes that are being held around the definition of "symbol" and "sign" meaning it is worth noting that, in general, symbolism is a system of signs or figurative constructions saturated with various semantic nuances. Of course, a symbol is also a sign with an infinite set of values and an infinite number of contexts for any expression [Symbol. Sheynina E.Ya. 2003, p. 4]. Yu.M. Lotman noted that one of the main attributes of the nobility - a sword, could represent itself as a weapon, as a part of clothing and as a direct symbol and sign [Lotman Yu.M. 1994, p. 7]. A sword is the symbol of the symbol: it means a sword, and a sword means the belonging to the privileged class and symbolizes a free person.

Symbols have several levels of values. In most cases, a particular symbol is associated with one area of knowledge or a sphere of human life. Everything depends on the context in which a symbol is considered. A picture in the Baroque style can be just a pretty pastoral scene on one level of perception, on the other - the embodiment of morality, and on the third - an indicator of its owner wealth and his love for art. Symbols are a part of our daily life, a base is formed from them, which serves as the basis for the understanding of more complex symbols. Although the specific meanings of the base symbols in different cultures may differ somewhat, they, however, are clear to all of us. But at the same time, a symbol never reveals all of its content to a man, but only that part that becomes actual for him, which he is able to understand, as it is consonant with the changes in his soul, his spiritual quests and aspirations.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

Symbolism that appeared in ancient times always accompanied human society. Its purpose was to explain various natural phenomena in society as well as the development of various structures that were to be given a certain meaning. Traditionally, symbols can be divided into several types, but the main ones are secular and religious one, which complement each other. A variety of symbols contain a large amount of encrypted information, which allows you to see different aspects of Russian society life in different historical periods.

#### 5. SUMMARY.

Thus, on the basis of the conducted research it is necessary to note the following. First, the knowledge of the symbols of different peoples, states, religious confessions, international organizations, political parties and movements is an essential component of modern humanitarian education. Everyone should have a clear idea of what a symbol is, what is its place and role in culture and society; know the meaning of the main symbolic signs, use them correctly; respect the symbols of not only their own people and culture, but also the symbols representing other religions and cultures.

Secondly, symbols are the signs, the connections between a body and a spirit, which allow people to feel any idea. The symbolic system is based on the connection between myth and reality, the essence of which it describes in the ciphered elements of form, rhythm, number, sign, color and gesture.

Thirdly, a person understands or does not understand the innermost content of a symbol, whether its outward form seems strange and remote to him. A symbol can always influence a person and be a teacher and a mentor in his life provided that a person genuinely needs it and does not remain indifferent to it.



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